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SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND FOREIGN MINISTER SUPPORTS IRAQ
ELECTION

¶1. The following text is a statement from Foreign Minister Goff's office, released January 31, 2005.

¶2. Begin text:

ELECTION RESULT REPRESENTS PROGRESS TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC AND PEACEFUL IRAQ

Foreign Minister Phil Goff has welcomed the holding of the election in Iraq, and says that the level of voter turnout should be sufficient to give legitimacy to a new transitional government.

"These elections represent a key step towards achieving a democratic and peaceful Iraq. They are the first opportunity Iraqi people have had in half a century to determine their own government," Mr Goff said.

"The process is essential to give legitimacy and a mandate to a transitional government that will have the task of drafting a new constitution by August and preparation for elections in December.

"New Zealand fully supports this process and provided \$1.5 million to Iraq, through the United Nations, towards it. We unreservedly condemn the violence perpetrated by insurgents who have endeavoured to stop this process occurring.

"We pay tribute to the estimated eight million Iraqis who defied the intimidation and violence and made the effort to cast their ballots. In the circumstances prevailing, a 60 per cent turn out of those eligible to vote is a good result. Final figures on turnout, and results, will not be known for several weeks.

"However celebration of the successful holding of the election must be tempered by acknowledgement of a low turnout by Sunni voters. Sunni Arabs make up 20 per cent of the population and Sunni extremists are at the core of the insurgency.

"Ways must be found to involve Sunnis in the drafting of the constitution, which will define power among Iraq's disparate groups, and to give them a stake in the new government.

"New Zealand has contributed around \$10 million through NZAID towards the rebuilding of Iraq, and deployed a Defence Force light engineering group in Basra for a year to help with reconstruction efforts.

"We will continue to provide appropriate support to assist Iraq towards a democratic, stable and prosperous future," Mr Goff said.

End text.

Swindells